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# The text-structural activities in ELT and (T)urkish (L)anguage (T)eaching

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## Abstract

As a communicative unit, a text has a multi-layer structure. Text layers are relevant to competent systems in language acquisition: Microstructure for linguistic competence, macrostructure for communicative competence and superstructure for generic competence. Texts are sequences of propositions from microstructures to macrostructures or vice versa in the process of comprehension or production. With this qualitative research the standardization in the context of teaching the construction of text structure hierarchically through the activities on written texts has been questioned in teaching English and Turkish as a foreign language.

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## 1. Introduction

Text is regarded as the communicative unit as the result of contemporary studies in linguistics. As Beaugrande & Dressler (1988) argued whereas a language is a virtual system of available options not yet in use, the text is an actual system in which options have been taken from their repertoires and utilized in a particular structure. The text is distinguished by its ‘textuality’, based not only on cohesion and coherence, which are co-text standards but also on the contextual standards, which are intentionality, acceptability, situationality, intertextuality, and informativity (Beaugrande & Dressler, 1988). As soon as we talk about language use and cognitive processing we use the term discourse not the text, which is the abstract underlying structure of a discourse (van Dijk, 1980). However, it reveals something about the socio-cultural context such as the sender/receiver and the social situation. Text analysis is a kind of

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discourse analysis (Birch, 1996, p.169) as the text has a multi-layer structure. In the process of textualization first the contents of the message are related logically and semantically, and then the language elements conveying the message are related linguistically and grammatically. Uzun-Subaşı (2006) remarks three layers of text structure reflecting these relations: 1. Microstructure (Linguistic and grammatical relations), 2. Macrostructure (semantic relations), 3. Metatextual structure (discourse relations). Günay (2003) also matches the standards of textuality with the layers of text structure: 1. Microstructure (cohesion), 2. Macrostructure (coherence, intentionality, acceptability, situationality, and informativity), 3. Superstructure (intertextuality).

Discourse coherence should be accounted for at both the local and the global level. A text is a semantic unit, which is not composed of sentences but is realized in sentences (Halliday, 1977). The phrase and the sentence can be utilized in a short span of time and processing resources. Surface structures are more predominantly maintained in a “short-term” storage, and conceptual content in a “long-term” storage. The establishment of local coherence takes place in a short-term memory under the general monitoring of the control system, of a macroproposition (van Dijk & Kintsch 1983). The meanings of a discourse should be expressed/signalled directly or indirectly by the surface of the text. Semantic macrostructures are signalled directly by titles, thematic sentences, connectives, pronouns, adverbs etc., or else they are expressed indirectly by sequences of sentences since the local coherence of discourse cannot be fully explained only in terms of local relationships between propositions.

Global coherence characterizes a discourse as a whole. Macrostructures, which are global semantic information relative to the microstructures of discourse, cognition and interaction, provide abstract semantic descriptions of the global content, and hence of the global coherence of discourse (van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983). Language users need effective strategies, which include not only textual information but also contextual to guess about the topic of a discourse fragment. Whereas the contextual macro strategies set up anticipatory expectations about possible discourse topics, the various properties of the text itself provide the definite decisions about the actual one. Textual macro strategies which are structural signals (the semantic functions of the positions of topical expressions, titles and key words), syntactic strategies (passive structure and the distinction between super ordinate and subordinate sentences), topic change markers (conjunctions and adverbs), semantic strategies (expressed macro positions or inferred from semantic representations), and schematic strategies (generic structure) are used to infer macrostructures.

Superstructures can be defined as conventionalized schemata, which provide the global ‘form’ for the macro structural ‘content’ of a text. Superstructures consist of often hierarchically organized categories having been developed from functional properties (Dijk, 1980). The establishment of explicit links between semantic macrostructures and schematic superstructures is important for a theory of discourse. A story is a discourse which expresses a macrostructure which is organized by a narrative schema. The current paradigm in cognitive psychology assumes that superstructures may facilitate comprehension, storage and retrieval of discourse under certain circumstances since information processing takes place in multiply organized chunks. Sentences and discourses are understood and stored on the basis of their units, categories, and levels (Dijk & Kintsch, 1983). A superstructure is the schematic form that organizes the global meaning of a text, whereas in rhetorical structure sequences of sentences are organized being assigning various functions such as specification, comparison to those sentences (Dijk, 1980). Many discourse types have a more-or-less fixed schematic organization. Stories have a narrative schema with the categories of abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution and coda, and every day conversations generally begin with greetings exchange and may end with leave-taking phrases. The reader must be aware of the schematic structures of different genres, then it is not necessary for them to read the whole text or a whole episode to get local or global information.

## 2. The aim and the method of the research

The basic aim of the research is to find out how effective are the activities on texts in ELT and TLT to equip learners with the knowledge of text structure in order to develop their receptive and productive skills. Communicative approach in language teaching supports the idea of dealing with language items through their functions in textuality and the fact that learning language means to be able to analyse and produce texts in all contexts. Therefore, in *the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2000), a hierarchical process from microstructures to superstructures, from simple isolated phrases and sentences to detailed texts with broad active reading vocabulary and a variety of linking words, is observed in illustrative scales of common reference levels for overall written production, overall reading comprehension and discourse competence- the scales for coherence. The aim of this qualitative research is to determine the mentioned hierarchical process in Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language with a comparative study. *Success* (Elementary [A1] & Pre-Intermediate [A2/B1]) and *Yeni Hitit* (İlk [A1/A2] & Orta [B1]) series have been taken as sample. The activities on written texts in the course books have been classified according to the layers of text-structure and compared. It is necessary to define rules, operations, transformations, or other mapping rules to relate the respective levels of microstructures and macrostructures. (Dijk, 1980). Therefore the components of the layers of text structure by Dilidüzgün (2010) have been used as categories of this content analysis. As a result of the research the standardization in the context of constructing text structure hierarchically through the activities on written texts has been questioned in foreign language teaching.

## 3. Results

As summarised in Table 1, at microstructure level, reference, is dealt with in *Success Elementary* (SE) more than *Success Pre-Intermediate* (SPI), while in *Yeni Hitit 1* (YH1) their number is less than *Yeni Hitit 2* (YH2). The use of ellipsis are practised in SPI more than SE, since ellipsis requires more proficiency, on the other hand in YH1 and YH2 there are no activities on it although it is often used as a feature of some genres, such as notes or news headings.

Table 1. The number of activities on written texts classified into the contents of the of text structure layers

Microstructure	Success Elementary	Success Pre-Int	Yeni Hitit 1	Yeni Hitit 2
Reference	5	2	2	4
Substitution	0	0	0	0
Ellipsis	2	3	0	0
Conjunction	5	1	2	7
Paralellism	0	1	0	0
Tense, aspect, mood	24	34	10	6
Functional sentence perspective	0	0	0	0
Lexical cohesion	27	24	28	35
Other	37	17	10	0
Macrostructure				
Function	2	2	0	0
Title	2	5	4	2
Topic	5	7	0	0
Key words	0	5	0	0
Thematic sentence	0	3	0	0
Content	38	65	46	131
Topic change markers	1	4	0	0
Style	6	9	3	3
Summary	0	4	2	3
Concluding sentence	0	2	0	2
Superstructure	2	15	1	1

The number of studies on conjunctions, being a cohesive device (Halliday & Hasan, 1976) is normally more in SE than SPI, but in YH1 it is less than YH2. In SPI there is only one activity on parallelism. In Success series, grammatical items are taught along with their functions in the discourse by means of text-oriented activities. Therefore, there are more activities on tense, aspect and mood, especially in SPI the number gets higher due to modal instruction, than Yeni Hitit series, in which the grammatical items are only highlighted in the text not referring them when teaching grammar and the existing activities such as filling the blanks in the text with tense suffixes or choosing the word with the appropriate suffix mainly aim to assess the learner's grammatical knowledge. Although the numbers of the studies on lexical cohesion in four books are approximately equal, they differ in style and content. Whereas in Success the activities require text awareness with the example of matching the texts within the same conceptual field, filling the blanks with the given words constitute the majority in Yeni Hitit. Both series aim to teach vocabulary within a context: In Success, besides the activities such as matching highlighted words in the texts with their definitions, the strategies are applied for dealing with new words while in Yeni Hitit, matching words with their synonyms/definitions is the main type. There are no activities on substitution, "reference to a class of items in the text" (Hatch, 1997) and functional sentence perspective in both series at these levels, which are thought to be dealt with in advanced level.

The result of the analysis at macrostructure level shows that although the percentage of the activities is higher in YH1 and YH2 than SE and SPI there are no activities on the communication functions, the topics, the key words, the thematic sentences and topic change markers. While the number of activities on function is equal in SE and SPI, the numbers go up gradually for the activities on title, topic and topic change markers. The activities on title in YH1 are conversely more than YH2. There are activities for key words and thematic sentence only in SPI. A gradual increase in the number of activities on content has been observed within the both series; nevertheless they differ in type and function. While Success series provide the learners with the awareness of coherence, unity, support and detail in texts with the activities such as matching the paragraphs with the given topics; choosing the omitted paragraph and finding which knowledge is prior in the text, in Yeni Hitit most of the activities require the learners' comprehension of texts such as True/False questions (54 in YH2 but 7 in SPI) and choosing what is in the text (38 in YH2). There are activities concerning stylistic coherence in both series: Success focus on register and lexical choice with the activities based on the narrator's view and the features of genres; on the other hand finding basic meanings of idiomatic usages and retelling the story changing the narrator are the activities in Yeni Hitit. Summary as a notion of macrostructure does not normally exist in SE, instead the basic ingredients of it (key words, thematic sentence and title) are presented at this level. Saying the same thing in the text in a different way and finding out the features of summary texts are the activities in SPI. In YH1 learners are asked to rewrite the story, which requires the analysis of text, and YH2 they are directly asked to summarize the text or to put the sentences which make up the summary in the correct order. The second books of both series have activities related to the concluding sentence but in a different sense. SPI deals with semantic coherence analytically with the activities revealing the relation between the first and the last paragraphs and implicating the importance of the last paragraphs to grasp the main idea, while in YH2 activities such as choosing what the last paragraph mean and which must be the last paragraph requires the comprehension of the text.

The number of activities on superstructure is very little in elementary level since it requires a bit language knowledge first. However, as the aim in language teaching comes to equip learners with the competence of interpreting and producing texts at higher levels, in SPI there is a huge increase in the number of activities to develop the knowledge of superstructures of genres; besides activities such as analyzing the parts of the narrative, matching the categories of a letter, finding out the range of knowledge in a description, examining the lexical choice, tense or topic change markers of a genre help learners to develop generic competence.

#### 4. Conclusion and Discussion

As shown in Table 2, in SE, activities on microstructure are greater than the ones on macrostructure to help learners develop their linguistic competence and understand the functions of cohesive devices to constitute a text. In SPI not only the percentage of activities on macrostructure goes up to equip learners with the communicative competence, but also there is a significant increase in activities on superstructure to help learners process information in multiply organized chunks, which are proper to genres, to interpret and create texts appropriate to a specific context and develop generic competence. Success series is said to have a hierarchical transition between the competence systems relevant to text structure.

Table 2. The percentage of text activities in terms of text structures

Course book	Microstructure (%)	Macrostructure (%)	Superstructure (%)
Success Elementary	53	36	1
Success Pre-Intermediate	41	52	7
Yeni Hitit I	48	51	1
Yeni Hitit II	22	77	1

In YH1 the percentage of macrostructure activities is greater than microstructure ones, which shows that the functions of the language items are not taught within a context and learners are not able to discover their functions in constituting texts. This means that learners may have linguistic competence but it is hard to say they can communicate in a social context. As a result of too many comprehension questions learners are obliged to analyze the text themselves, and can not gain text awareness. In Table 2 it is observed that while activities on macrostructure go up, there is no change in the percentage of activities on superstructures in YH2, which shows that it is not possible for learners to develop generic competence although there are some activities to get macro propositions or to find out the construction of a text such as putting the paragraphs in order or matching the topics with the paragraphs. In YH2 while there is an excessive increase in the percentage of activities on macrostructure, insufficient activities on microstructure and superstructure shows imbalance between competence systems as well as the relations between text structures. In summary, it can be said that the activities on written texts in Success series aims to equip learners with text awareness and genre-specific knowledge, while the ones in Yeni Hitit series focus on the content of the text and not sufficient to help learners to comprehend and produce texts appealing text structure.

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